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## A record of the Common Dunnart *Sminthopsis uuriua* using artificial habitat

The Common Dunnart *Sminthopsis murina* inhabits mallee scrub, dry heath, dry forest and woodland within Victoria, mostly in the north and west of the state (Atlas of Victorian Wildlife). All areas where the species is found have sparse shrub and ground cover, but usually with a dense cover of ground litter (Menkhorst 1995). However, the species is no longer common and is now classed as vulnerable in Victoria. Records of the Common Dunnart exist close to Melbourne, particularly to the north east on dry slopes and ridges south of the Kinglake ranges, in the vicinity of Watsons Creek.



Fig. 1. Concrete paver used to produce nesting cavity.

In this district, the Watsons Creek Nature Conservation Link is made up of remnant habitat areas along Watsons Creek and several Crown Conservation Reserves, which join the Kinglake ranges to the north and the Yarra Valley to the south. Within this link, One Tree Hill Reserve is the largest area of reserved crown land and provides important habitat for several rare and threatened species, including the Powerful Owl *Ninox strenua*, Brush-tailed Phascogale *Phascogale tapoatafa* and Common Dunnart.

As part of a habitat enhancement program, RMIT University, in conjunction with Parks Victoria, positioned forty concrete pavers on several slopes in Dry Grassy Woodland at One Tree Hill, in habitat that was considered typical for the Common Dunnart. Each paver measured 380 mm by 380 mm and had a thickness of 45 mm (Fig. 1). The forty pavers were laid between October 2003 and March 2004. They were positioned in four lines of ten, with about ten metres between pavers. A nesting cavity was excavated under each block and dry grass was provided for nesting material.

### One Tree Hill Common Dunnart record, March 2006

On 24/3/2006, staff and students from the School of Life and Physical Sciences, RMIT University, visited One Tree Hill Reserve with Mr Campbell Beardsell of Parks Victoria, principally to study the techniques and results of ecological burning. Towards the end of the day, as we were about to conclude the visit, we realised that the track leading to the easiest exit passed closely to one of the lines of pavers. It was decided to show the students some of the pavers and explain the reason for their presence in the reserve. When the second paver in the line was lifted, to our surprise, a Common Dunnart was found sheltering under the paver. The animal was subsequently captured by hand (see cover picture) and proved to be an adult male. The dunnart was released hard against the entrance to the paver, but ran directly to the next paver in the line and disappeared under it. It is interesting to note that the area from which this record was obtained was subjected to an ecological burn in March 2005, and ground cover in March 2006, was particularly sparse.

Other records exist for the Common Dunnart in this reserve which also involve the species using artificial habitat. On the 25/5/1968, the then Mammal Survey Group (now Fauna Survey Group) of the FNCV visited One Tree Hill and captured two common Dunnarts that were found under discarded galvanised iron (FNCV unpubl. data). This was six years after

wildfire had burnt through the area in 1962. On 20 November 1988, Beardsell (1997) carried out a detailed ten hectare search of dense tussocks on slopes directly below the site where the Common Dunnart was found on 24/3/2006. During the search two adult female Common Dunnarts were found, both with pouched young, one in a grass tussock and the other under discarded galvanised iron.

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Many thanks to Cam Beardsell, Parks Victoria, whose idea it was to use concrete pavers as habitat at One Tree Hill Reserve. Richard Francis, formerly of RMIT University, organised and supervised the laying of the pavers and numerous RMIT students helped carry the pavers down steep slopes. The specimen mentioned in this article was handled under the terms of Research Permit No. 10002492 issued by the Department of Sustainability and Environment and by RMIT Animal Ethics Committee Approval No. 315.

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## *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*

Final recommendations in regard to nominations for listing under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988. The nominations for the following taxa to be listed as threatened are supported by the Scientific Advisory Committee July 2006.

Marsh Tree-moss *Climacium dendroides*  
Oval Wedge-fern *Lindsaea trichomanoides*